2017 Chief FOIA Officer Report

Corporation for National and Community Service

Angela R. Williams

Acting General Counsel and Chief FOIA Officer

In the past year since the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) submitted its 2016 Chief FOIA Officer report, the agency has continued to focus particular attention on proactively disclosing more information to the public. We have also made every effort to maintain our attentive customer service.

Proactive Disclosure and Presumption of Openness

The primary vehicle for the increased proactive disclosure has been our public website, www.nationalservice.gov.

The website saw 2,259 new postings (as opposed to simple updates) this past year.

CNCS began posting "state impact reports" that give a snapshot of what the CNCS-supported programs and initiatives in each state are accomplishing. Here's a sample. To search for the impact reports, users can go to National Service in Your State, select a state, and then under "Downloads," select the state's Impact Report.

This year CNCS formalized an Open Data Team. The team has worked on protocols to track the requests for data that we receive so we can easily note where there is particular interest on the part of the public, and particularly our stakeholders (for instance, state service commissions) and proactively post that information in anticipation of further, or similar, requests. For instance, a state service commission submitted a FOIA request for data on specific service sites so they could create a map of their state that highlights where residents are getting support through CNCS-funded national and local service programs and projects. Our response interested the other state service commissions, who in turn asked for their own state data. Because we had multiple requests, the Open Data Team has begun a comprehensive data collection effort so they can share this information for all state service commissions.

One of the new sections that was added to our website this year is the Evidence Exchange, where we now post all CNCS research reports online. Among other links, the Evidence Exchange connects users to a section with Evaluation Resources and to our Open Data page, which features a catalogue and video tutorial.

Our Budget page contains all of the FY 2017 budget materials, plus historical data.

CNCS added several new contact addresses: data@cns.gov, opendata@cns.gov, and evaluation@cns.gov to allow interested members of the public easier access to CNCS information and resources.

In the past year, we fully released the requested records in 42.5% of FOIA requests. We made a partial release of records in 27.7% of requests. We made only a single full denial. The remainder of the requests were either withdrawn or we found no responsive records.

Timeliness and Backlogs

Because our annual number of requests is so small, we are able to acknowledge requests – with only very rare exceptions – the same day they arrive. Our average response time for all simple requests for FY 2016 was 7 days; for requests in which information was granted, it was 7.4 days. For complex requests, without a sole outlier response that took 170 days for a search that included all of the campuses for one of our programs, our average response time for complex requests in which information was granted was 28.5.

CNCS has had no backlog for the past two years.

Customer Service and a Spirit of Cooperation

CNCS believes it already provides excellent communication and customer service. However, to improve CNCS's system for responding to FOIA requests, this year we trained all of our field staff in their responsibilities under the FOIA. Our aim was to improve the quality and timeliness of records searches in offices outside of our headquarters.

When a request is unclear or otherwise requires clarification, the FOIA Officer either immediately send an email to the requester, or, if they have given us a phone number, we pick up the phone and call them.

Several times in the past year, this resulted in happy requesters and streamlined results. One requester didn't understand that federal agencies generally operate independently from one another, and sent us a request for Social Security information. Our FOIA Officer called him, found out what he actually needed, got the relevant Social Security Administration contact information, and sent that to the happy requester.

Another requester asked for an extensive range of records for her dissertation research. Concerned that the request was not only unclear, but was so vast and old (dating back to the creation of CNCS) that searching for and reviewing the records would slow down her dissertation, the FOIA Officer asked the relevant program director to call the requester and find out what she really needed. In the end, the requester withdrew her request, because we were able to offer her a chance to work directly with the program. She told us that the data she was now going to be able to get was far better than what she'd hoped for. We were delighted to help her.

Greater Use of Technology

CNCS's Office of Information Technology (OIT) made an important change in the past year. In 2015, we switched to using Office 365, which gives us cloud storage. In 2016, we began taking advantage of this storage and search capacity to greatly improve our capacity to respond quickly and completely to requests for emails. Previously, all but the most current

emails were stored on electronic tapes, off site, and required laborious, slow recreation. If a request was large, it sometimes took months to get the responsive records. Although the oldest email records are still stored on the electronic tapes, OIT can now pull records in days if they were created since we began using Office 365.